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Disease.

A Thesis

by

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An Essay

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By

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Disease

The introduction of sin, disease, and death into the world put between human nature and the higher intelligences a sad, dark distinction, and substituted misery, pain, and despair for happiness, hope, and the fruition of hope; mental & corporeal disease, for sanity and fearless health; death, with all its imagined horrors, for a life of unending bliss; and, greatest, necessitated the atoning agonies of our Lord the Christ). Since then pain heralds the entrance of a human being into the world, and sobs, and moans of anguish form the requiem which announces his exit; and ever and anon, during life,

disease starts up, and presses him upon his bed, with its cold hand, to remind him that he is mortal.

Life is an enigma, disease is a problem, and death, - what is it?

The earnest, truth-seeking physiologist, the laborious and observing physician, and the unbiassed, scrutinizing, close-judging pathologist must still bend their energies to the resolving of the enigma, the problem & the question, yet the three must have passed with them all before they will attain the resolution. Their full knowledge will come too late to be shared by the living, but their antecedent labors will not have been without shedding some new light upon the gloom of the discussion. And while we gratefully accept the labors of those who have preceded us, we too, while we live, will add

our rush-lights to aid in dispelling the darkness.

Life, disease, and death are intimately, nay, inseparably connected. The creature possessing the first must experience the last, and is ever liable to the second. All things have life, the same one, indivisible life. God made nothing decaying, dead. The animal and vegetable creation, the everlasting hills, and eternal rocks, the air we breathe and the waters that surround us, all have their own peculiar life. Can death reign in a scene instinct with a natural opposition to it? Can there be decay and death without previous existence? Not without a thing can cease to be that never was.

The query, What is Life? must remain unanswered. To him who would seek to unravel its mystery, and find out its essence it proves itself but a name, a something whose length & breadth he

cannot measure, which he cannot hold, and which is not appreciable by any of those senses which man possesses. But we can see, and measure, and appreciate the results of life, its self-manifestation. We can feel it stirring thro' all our frames, and sending its impulses to action thro'out our whole system, and as we thus perceive it we may study it. Our object is not now, however, to study it in its healthy and vigorous action, but as that action is deranged by foreign and opposing causes.

The loss of health is severely felt by man. For it overthrows all his plans; often deranges his business at a critical moment; compels unwonted self-denials; fills him with feebleness; wrings him with pain; torments him with a sense of his own impotence, and weakness; and shows him too plainly that the hair-suspended sword of Damocles is ever above him. He earnestly seeks

relief, recovery, cure. He recovers — only to be stricken again in another form, at a future time. Disease is manifold, and its constitution, modifications and vagaries need careful study to be comprehended & overcome. Numerous difficulties environ the study, for the basis of the study of disease must be an accurate knowledge of physiology. But doubt and obscurity envelope this, and shut from our eyes many important truths which we would gain know, and cast a far deeper and thicker darkness upon the abnormal states of the economy. Hence it is difficult even to define disease, as the multitude of definitions which have been given fully attest. Strictly speaking disease is not that which we usually call so. It does not consist in the crude appearances presented to us as its phenomena, but in something behind all these, the cause of which these are the effects. But in general terms it may be defined, "Any deviation

from the natural state of the living body." It may be called, Any Deviation from health, but then health must be defined, and no universally applicable definition - which is at the same time sufficiently explicit has been, or can be given to it. Each living body is a law to itself, and no one either is, or can be a law to another in every minor respect. Slight idiosyncrasies determine the difference. In the majority of cases these idiosyncrasies are so small as not to affect the general law seriously, but in others they stand out so boldly as to perplex the unconscious practitioner. In an auscultatory examination of the chest disease may be diagnosticated, - or the diagnosis & treatment rendered doubtful - by a puerile, or exceedingly feeble respiratory murmur, which nevertheless may be the natural and healthy state of the individual, or in comparing the corresponding points upon the chest - especially just beneath the

clavicles - a difference might be observed, which, according to the general law, would indicate disease, but which, according to the idiosyncratic law of that particular chest, may be the strongest proof of health. The natural & healthy state of some pulses would indicate disease by their undue slowness, rapidity, softness, or intermittency, or in disease would indicate health. Periodical discharges may exist, as from long established issues, hemorrhoids, epistaxis &c, which have become incorporated as a part of the individual law of health. The practitioner will frequently be called to notice the frequency and power of this idiosyncratic law with regard to his medicines, some constitutions appearing exceedingly susceptible to certain remedies, while others are totally unimpressible by them. The same idiosyncratic law shows itself in one person being perfectly comfortable in a temperature in which another may be shivering; or one may look calmly upon

a flow of blood, while his co-seer may drop in complete syncope. The old adage, "What is one man's meat is another mans poison" recognizes the same law, and that in the sick as well as in the healthy. Gruel, so often prescribed for the sick, has caused an attack of gastralgia in one whose stomach would tolerate beef tea. And we find honey causing the most intense colic in one; crabs & clams producing urticaria in another; lobsters an erysipelatous eruption with itching in a third; the delicious strawberry becoming a perfect poison to a fourth; and the raspberry or apple producing peculiar eruptions in a fifth, while a sixth suffers severe vomiting, and purging, and headache for days in succession to pay for eating a piece of rhubarb pie; and a seventh turns pale and faints, as a cambric handkerchief laden with musk is waved gracefully near him; and yet another returning from an afternoon's walk near the woods

breaks out into vesicles and bullae, or into a red, burning, & itching swelling, while all his companions escape unharmed.

Now an epidemic, or other disease, attacking these different persons affected by their peculiar idiosyncrasies must be modified more or less by them, and he will be the most successful practitioner who will the most regard them.

Remembering then these modifications of the general law, & rejecting them from the description of any particular genus of disease, we may accept the definition given above, and speak of disease as any deviation from individual health.

It is a well known fact that the organism will not become subject to disease unless it possess an adaptation to it, or a susceptibility for it. We often see epidemic contagious diseases, as Scarlatina, Measles, Small pox, Ty-

phoid Fever &c, enter a family, prostrating perhaps three out of five, and leaving the other two untouched. Yet, at another time, these unattacked two may suffer severely from a much slighter exposure to contagion. We have perfect confidence in vaccination to ensure us from an attack of small-pox, and feel perfectly safe in the idea that our susceptibility to its virus has been destroyed. It is well illustrated too in the acclimation of a foreigner, the acclimating fever producing so thoro' a change that he is no longer subject to it, and on his return to his native land will become liable to its acclimating disease, as tho' he had never resided there. It is at these times of susceptibility of the system that we contract an acute disease.

But morbific poison may be received into the system, and there lie dormant for years, at least, in no other way can we sometimes

accounts for the sudden appearance of chronic diseases. Liebig's theory of contagion may assist us here. He supposes that, as yeast mixed with sweet work will not multiply & increase itself unless it finds gluten on which to work, so a morbific virus will not shows itself, unless and until it finds that quality in the blood upon which it can act according to its own law. Mercury has lain dormant in the system 7 or years, and at last shown its virulence & power in old age. The impossibility of fixing the time when a person bitten by a mad dog will be entirely free from danger, illustrates the same. Eleven days, according to one author; nineteen according to another; one month; three; nine; twenty; twenty four according to others, and one case is reported from Springfield, Mass. to have occurred eighteen years after the infliction of the bite! Perhaps it is not unphilosophical to believe

that every man has within him the seeds of an acute or chronic disease, which may lie there undeveloped, like seeds found in an Egyptian mummy, until the proper conditions for their development are presented. It is so with the different cachexies, the cancerous, scorbutic, scrofulous, arthritic &c. and with those diseases which are universally acknowledged to be hereditary, as insanity, tuberculous phthisis, & various cutaneous affections. Maturity, middle age, and sometimes old age, come on before they manifest themselves to the detriment of health, and even a life may be passed without symptoms of them appearing, the fact of their existence only being recognised by their undoubted manifestations in the next generation, or by their giving strength & peculiarity to the idiosyncratic law of the individual.

When a morbific cause has been received

into the system. it may be said to act in three ways, vitally, chemically, and mechanically. Each of these three methods have had exclusive adherents in former ages, who have diligently and learnedly upheld them. But one does not act to the exclusion of the other, for they are all concerned in the production and continuation of Disease. Vitality lies at the base of them all. It is that power which holds the body together; which selects its nourishment; which carries on its actions; which manifests the affinities and repulsions of health, & the sympathetic and abnormal states of Disease; which warns us of Danger and compels us to shun injury; which manifests the natural antipathies of taste, sight, sound, smell, & touch; which tells us whether we are in health or Disease; and which makes itself recognized in a thousand ways. Chemistry & Mechanics are but its handmaids. Chemistry

brings to it the products to be elaborated, and bears them away after elaboration. There yet lacks proof that chemistry prepares & applies the objects of nutrition; presents and keeps them till nutrition has been accomplished; and then bears them away to be cast out as effete matter. Such proof must rest upon the sand basis of hypothesis, and the higher the grander, the nobler the edifice raised upon it, the more completely & surely will the unstable foundation give way. Yet Chemistry acts its part, and without it life could not be, but the Chemist cannot imitate out of the body all the actions which take place in it. He may demonstrate the constituents of a secretion, but he cannot make the secretion itself. So Mechanics has much to do with our body in all its states. It is necessary to health and it causes disease, but in both cases its basis is the vital power. The three are necessary to life

and the three may act abnormally, and constitute disease, and in many cases their products are the same. For instance, the small pox presents us with an example of pus, the product of the vital power; caustic potassa, acting merely as a chemical agent, gives us another example of pus; and an abscess produced by a blow with a third. In all these cases the pus is identical, and the first and the third cannot be produced upon dead matter, while the second may. They all have their peculiar sphere in health & disease, and ~~each~~ have their peculiar province in the curing of disease, a province which can easily be assigned them from their known physiological action.

Diseases are usually divided into two or more great classes, and these classes again subdivided into groups & genera. The usual great division is into acute & chronic; the acute comprising all those

whose commencement is comparatively sudden and unexpected; and the chronic all those which commence insidiously; either de novo, or as the result of an acute disease. Another distinction might be made by assigning to the division of acute diseases all those which ensue within a limited time after the application of a morbific cause, and to the division of chronic diseases all those whose morbific cause has been acting in the system unperceivedly for a length of time, and which, having thus become more completely identified with changes in the whole system, require a lengthened time as an element in their cure. In both cases the chronic disease has a variable course, and an uncertain termination, while the acute disease has a definite course, and a termination within a circumscribed period. These two great divisions have numerous subdivisions, & these subdivisions

their peculiar varieties, but the subdivisions & varieties of both are in a great measure the same. The most obvious general subdivision is into diseases of the nervous system & of the circulatory system. Under the former we recognize some of our most painful diseases, under the latter some of our most dangerous & alarming, and under a combination of them both, some of our most dreaded & fatal. There are but few diseases which do not implicate them both, but in most cases one or the other is so prominent that we can recognize it as the leading lesion. The minor subdivisions, depending on these major, are diseases of the alimentary canal, comprising those of the mouth, pharynx, œsophagus, stomach, and intestinal tube as varieties; disease of the glandular organs, as of the liver, spleen, pancreas &c, with their connections & the ganglionic ganglions as varieties; diseases of the respiratory organs, larynx, trachea, bronchia, lungs,

&c; diseases of the organs of sense; peculiar diseases of the genital organs; cutaneous diseases; and, lastly, those diseases which will not strictly allow of any such classification, as the different kinds of fevers, cachexies, &c.

These various classes of diseases have each their causes, each produce effects, and present the results of those effects. The cause does not necessarily determine the disease, for of two persons exposed to the same morbific influence, cold & wet for example, one may have pneumonia & the other rheumatism, or one entirely escape the influence while the other suffers its power, or one have a common cold, & the other a continued fever, &c. It has been previously shown that the effects of any morbific influence depend more on the state of the constitution at the moment of exposure, than upon any power inherent in the contagion or influence

itself, and this is more especially true of the large class of acute diseases. In chronic maladies, where morbific causes may continue to act a long while ere their effects are seen, the cause may seem to conquer the health principle, and thus to enable itself to act. The evil habits to which men become attached are of this class. Alcohol, tobacco, and opium, in all their forms, used habitually, alone, or united with late hours, the excitement of the various passions by the diverse forms of gambling, quarrelling or love; an unoccupied mind; the lack of a steady life purpose; or else the undue excitement attending ambition with all its harassing doubts and anxieties; the call upon the physical powers for their utmost exertion; or else entirely sedentary habits; and the overtasking of the intellect, all are morbific causes which work for a long series of years to effect their ultimate object - the induction

of a chronic disease. When they first invade the organism, it throws them off, but, weakened by their repeated and sustained attacks, it finally succumbs. The usual beverages, coffee & tea, as it regards some constitutions, belong to this category, and perhaps they are more sadly guilty in this respect than is generally acknowledged. These various causes, and others of like character, are called predisposing causes, as not in themselves causing disease, but only as preparing the way for an exciting cause to work. Yet they undoubtedly operate to alter the state of health, as is shown by the renovation of strength, the quietness of the nerves, the increased tonicity of the system, and the disappearance of many slight but troublesome ailments sequent upon their abandonment. It is sometimes difficult to class them, to know whether they are predisponent causes merely, or whether

they act the part of excitants. For they may so operate upon the system, as to allow a very slight, hardly recognizable exciting cause to work powerfully in the production of either an acute or chronic disease.

The number of the disease-producing causes is almost countless, including not only those things which we know to have a directly toxicological effect, but all those things which are used for nourishment, which are ordinarily essential to our health. A few of the more common and important causes may be given, besides those previously mentioned. Mechanical injuries; atmospheric changes both as to temperature and constituents; change of climate; malaria; contagion; excessive tension of the system, and its exhaustion; an unnecessary supply of nourishment, or the lack of it, or improper food; confinement in close situations, cramping situations at labor; coal-gasses; sudden

suppression of established fluxes; sudden & powerful mental emotions; age & sex; illicit habits; uncleanliness; fashion of dress; imitation; undue loss of blood; habit of disease; undue impressibility; irritation; childbirth; mining, and various kinds of labor producing fine dust, as mahogany-working, grinding &c; exposure to noxious exhalations; great fatigue; exposure for a long time to the direct rays of the sun; and many others like these constitute the primary causes of disease. Among the secondary causes, or those which have themselves been produced by a primary cause, we may adduce, suppressed perspiration; & suppression of any wonted secretion; irritation, or other disease of the gastro-enteric mucous membrane; congestion; inflammation; anemia; nervous erethism; indigestion; constipation; irregularity in the circulation; acute syphilis; repercussion of chronic cutaneous eruptions; acute diseases, in their sequelæ; improper medical treatment;

loss of balance between absorbents and exhalents, &c. Indeed, there is scarcely anything which may not at some time or other produce disease. It would be impossible to assign a particular set of causes which invariably result in an acute disease, and another set which as certainly produce a chronic disease, for they are interchangeable.

Every disease, according to modern Nosology and Pathology, has a "local habitation and a name". Its habitation may be either internal or external, and on any one or more of the organs or appendages of the body. Its name is uncertain, for it may vary with the whim of the theorist. Sometimes it is christened from the organ on which it may be seated, often from its characteristic symptom, and sometimes from the fancy of the nosologist alone. Hence it happens that one disease has many names. Nor are the distinctive characters of diseases well marked, now this

and now that symptom claiming to be pathognomonic, until in one and another mind various diseases are confounded & blended into one confused idea. Thus chronic laryngitis, tracheitis, bronchitis, pneumonia & phthisis, are often confounded, so that one will speak of a case of bronchitis recovered from as a case of consumption of the lungs cured, or a case of follicular laryngitis as one of severe bronchitis, or even phthisis cured. Nor can nosological arrangements be made much more distinct & decisive than they are now, for one disease insensibly shades into another, & practically, no strict line of separation can be drawn. This difficulty is not due to the disease itself, but to the peculiar, individual organization on which it acts. Hence the only legitimate deduction is, that every case of disease is a case sui generis, incapable of strict, practical classification, & must be treated, not only generally, as belonging to

a class, but particularly, as belonging exclusively to the individual. Not exactly thus has been the usual treatment of disease, but it has been classified on general principles, and the individual peculiarities been arranged as complications. The symptoms, so far as they were acknowledged by the classification, have received the grape and canister of the treatment, while small shot only were fired at the complications, until either both succumbed, or the latter carried off the patient. But the disease and its complications are an integrity, being brought into being by one & the same morbific power. And if an integrity it must have one or more medicines peculiarly adapted to it. Itself specific, its remedy must be specific likewise. And so in this; the only question being how & where to find it.

When disease assumes another phasis, and leaving its original seat, fixes itself upon another

organ, or becomes metastatic, it is still an integrity. The symptoms only vary, as the organ newly attacked varies from that which was its original seat. It still demands its specific remedy, this perhaps not the one primarily used. Every true remedy has its analogue, as well as every disease its phasis. so if disease is an unity, only presenting different forms and varieties-like life. the vis medicatrix is an unity, only manifesting itself in divers manners, as its agents are diverse. In this connection of the localization of the disease with the specificity of the remedy it must be noticed, that no two distinct diseases attack the same portion of the organism in precisely the same manner. The vis medicatrix too is necessarily confined only to those tissues attacked, for it is an absurdity to suppose the healing power to be applied to a perfectly healthy tissue. Whatever of medicinal force is applied to healthy tissue must necessa-

rily be noxious and therefore to be avoided. The malady must be fought upon its own ground, and not upon neutral territory, in order to be conquered tuto cite, & jucunde, and in order also to fulfill the time-honored medical maxim- tolle causam. The vast & injurious expense of force in the removal of a disease by revulsion becomes at once manifest, and the clumsiness, noxiousness, and incapacity of the method will not permit it the claim of being scientific. It is evident that if the disease can be attacked in its immediate seat, it will be the most strictly scientific mode of procedure, and that several striking advantages may be gained thereby. First, the easier conquest of the malady, with the smallest possible expenditure of medicinal power; second, its more thorough & complete eradication; third, the prevention in a great measure of unpleasant and disastrous sequelae; fourth, the safest, speediest

and pleasantest cure; fifth, a more thorough assurance of the integrity of the organ after the disease has left it; and sixth, a greater confidence in the action of remedies, and certainty in their prescription.

To obtain these advantages there must be a complete correspondence between the disease and its remedy, both as it regards the locale of their action, and their mode of action.

But how is this correspondence to be discovered that these advantages may be attained?

Every attack of disease manifests itself by certain sensations and signs named symptoms, and these symptoms differ relatively or absolutely according to the organ or tissue attacked and the manner of attack. They may differ completely and absolutely, as wakefulness & somnolency, or partially and relatively, as the acute pain attending the inflammation of

of a serous tissue, and the duller, but similar pain attending the inflammation of a mucous membrane. It is by the situation, character, and grouping of these symptoms that we discover the organ, and peculiar portion of the organ attacked, and the manner of the attack, and hence are enabled to prognosticate the termination. Each organ and tissue has its peculiar manifestations. Indeed symptoms are the language which the suffering organ uses. They are its laments, its groans, its cries for succor. Now if the remedy corresponding to the disease can be found, it must be one which would produce precisely these symptoms upon the organ when healthy. When these are produced we may know that the organ is attacked in as nearly as possible the same manner as by the disease, and that the remedy, if given in that disease would seize upon the suffering tissue, & affect it powerfully in the small dose.

And these relations of the disease to the organism, and the correspondences of the remedy, are but an enunciation of the truths of Homœopathy, and of the only known law of cure, Similia similibus curantur.